



## **NON-DENOMINATIONAL** by Sellers S. Crain, Jr.

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

Recently I have had the opportunity to meet and converse with several people who when I asked where they went to church, they replied, "I attend a non-denominational church." In fact, one of them was a preacher for a non-denominational church which was called Trinity Vineyard Community Church. When he said, "We are non-denominational," I said, "I am too." Adding to that I told him that though you may see many church buildings with the name Church of Christ on them, churches of Christ are non-denominational and that we have no earthly headquarters, no combining association or convention, and each congregation is totally autonomous (self-governing).

The word denomination means the act of denominating. It is a general name for a category. When Paul confronted the problem of division with the Corinthian church, it involved the members denominating (dividing) themselves behind their favorite preacher. Some were saying they were of Paul, others of Apollos, some Cephas (Peter), and even some were saying they were of Christ. He asked three important questions when he wrote, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (**1 Corinthians 1:13**). He pleaded with them to

Speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (**1 Corinthians 1:10**)

This had reference to division within a local congregation. However, the same principle of unity within the one body applies to the universal church of Christ, which includes all people world wide who have come into Christ through faith and obedience, as well.

When we speak of a non-denominational church, we are referring to a church that is not part of a larger denomination. "A denomination is a church organization that exercises some sort of authority over the local churches that comprise it." Where the church that Jesus built differs from that is seen in the book of Acts. There we read of Paul's missionary journeys and of the many churches that he established all through Eastern Europe as well as in the Middle East. Each of those congregations were self-governing, and there is no indication of any authority beyond each of those local congregations. Each of those congregations were left under the oversight of a local body of elders (**Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5**). Although these churches were independent, self-governing bodies, they were definitely connected in Scriptural teaching, and voluntarily cooperated with one another in spreading the gospel and in helping those in need.

A study was conducted by the Hartford Institute of Religious Research that reveals some startling statistics. They found that there are more than 12 million people who

are associated with non-denominational churches spread among 35,000 churches in America. They are found in 88% of the counties in the US and are one of the top five religious groups in 48 of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. What has brought about the phenomenal growth of these groups?

Dr. Thom Rainer conducted an informal poll on Twitter asking why people are moving away from denominational churches to those classified non-denominational. Here are answers to the eight questions he asked:

1. Denominational churches have a negative reputation or negative brand.
2. They are known more for what they are against than what they are for.
3. There is too much infighting and politics in them.
4. They are considered too liberal.
5. There is a general waning away from institutional loyalty, including denominational organizations.
6. They are too bureaucratic, having inefficient system of organization.
7. Some respondents saw no perceived benefit to belonging to a denomination.
8. They are not good stewards of their financial resources.

While churches of Christ have none of these negative characteristics, the fact that we proudly wear the name of our Lord Jesus Christ causes many people who don't know better to think we are just another denomination. We wear that name to let people know we belong to Christ and use only His word to guide us. So how can we confront this negativism? With people turning against denominational bodies, we have a tremendous opportunity to teach them that we are non-denominational in every respect. Peter said we should be...

Always ready to give a defense to everyone that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear. (**1 Peter 3:15**)

—-- *Sellers S. Crain, Jr.*